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ABSTRACT

Technology can be incorporated as a tool in business communication courses to help students format, revise, and enhance pieces of writing. The capabilities of the microcomputer should be introduced slowly to build competencies and confidence. This paper provides instructional tips and activities for introducing technology into assignments. Steps include: starting with the familiar; introducing editing features; integrating editing and e-mail; introducing templates/wizards; sharing assessment plans; extending job searches; introducing charts; introducing PowerPoint; and using search engines. Appendices include lecture notes; a sample quiz; a sample letter from the Teacher's Resources Manual, "Basic Business Communication"; steps for integrating Windows software and Eudora mail; and a direct request exam. (Author/AEF)

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ED 400 801

TECHNOLOGY IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

While the content of a business communication course bulges with topics such as letter patterns and styles, short and long reports, ethics, intercultural communications, oral presentations, and collaborative writing, technology can be incorporated as a tool that helps to get the work started, formatted, revised, and enhanced.

Use the capabilities of the microcomputer to slowly build competencies and confidence. Start with the familiar of retrieving files, add the windows environment and mouse movement, add editing features such as spell checkers and grammar checkers, progress to wizards and charts, and then leap to e-mail and the internet.

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TECHNOLOGY IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Given: a one-semester Business Communication class meeting in a room equipped with networked microcomputers for each student. The teacher's station includes a Pentium stand alone microcomputer with a projection system. Question: Without sacrificing course content, can an instructor integrate technology throughout the entire semester?

In the 1995 NBEA yearbook, *Technology in the Classroom*, Susan Jaderstrom writes that "technology should be a part of every class." She indicates that helping students adapt to technology contributes to their "future mobility, advancement potential, compensation, and job satisfaction." As a means to accomplish these goals for students, she suggests "integration of word processing, electronic mail, and desktop presentation software in business communication classes."

As early as the fall of 1993, the author moved her sections of Business Communication into a microcomputer laboratory setting. During 1993-1994, the students used stand alone pc's with WordPerfect 5.1, RightWriter, and Lotus 2.2 software. During 1994-1995, the students used stand alones with WordPerfect 6.0 for Windows and Lotus for Windows. During 1995-1996, the students are using networked pc's, Microsoft Word 6.0, WordPerfect 6.0 for Windows, Excel, PowerPoint, Eudora mail, and the Internet. Other technology such as distance learning, group support software, and video conferencing, however, are not addressed in this paper.

Start with the familiar

Although the computer literacy background of the students varies, most students come to the class with knowledge of DOS based word processing (WordPerfect 5.1) and spreadsheet software, or they are concurrently enrolled in such a course. On the first day of class, I distribute a "teaching disk" to each student. The computers are started and WordPerfect 5.1 is loaded. (Our lab is "rigged" or set up to default to Drive A. Therefore, most software will not load unless a disk is in Drive A.) The importance of logging on to Drive A is discussed, and the course syllabus is retrieved from the teaching disk. Each student prints a take-home copy.

On the second day of class, students retrieve the WordPerfect 5.1 version of the chapter outline saved on the teaching disk. They are encouraged to take notes as I use presentation software to fill in and enhance the contents of the lesson. The elements of the Windows environment are also introduced near the end of the class session.

On the third day of class, students bring disks to format. Then they load Windows 3.11 and Microsoft Word. This time, they practice retrieving files from the fileserver, moving around in the files, changing the font sizes, and saving these files to their new

disks. The topic for the day is external communication. The practice files are sample crisis letters or good will messages released by well-known firms.

Introduce editing features

Lesikar, Pettit, and Flatley (1993) cite a study indicating that "75 percent of the spelling errors in student letters could have been caught by spelling checkers." To illustrate the value of spell checking, my students edit a file created by a scanner. This file of lecture notes supplied by the publisher are scanned, saved to a disk, and then transferred to the fileserver. As expected, unusual spellings occur as illustrated by Appendix A.

As the students use files such as Appendix A, several skills are integrated early in the course: loading software, retrieving files from the fileserver, scrolling around in the file, changing font sizes, note taking, spell checking, and saving files to student disks. A benefit to the teacher and department occurs during test taking. Students have "no fear" of retrieving a test file from the teaching disk, scrolling around in the file, and changing font size as they mark their answers on scan sheets. The first page of a quiz over Chapters 1 and 2 (Appendix B), was typed using the outline feature.

Introduce additional editing features

While students are easily convinced of the obvious advantage of spell checking, they are often unaware of the value of grammar checkers and thesaurus. The benefits of grammar checkers as listed by Lesikar, Pettit, and Flatley (1993) include (a) checking grammar, style, word usage, and punctuation problems; (b) reporting readability, strength, descriptive, and jargon indexes; and (c) identifying slang, jargon, misspelled, misused, or difficult words for readers to understand. The authors further indicate that a thesaurus is a poweful tool and is more likely to be used in an electronic form than in book form.

A variety of other editing features can be just a few mouse clicks away. Students enjoy trying out these helpful features:

1. Bulleted items or enumerated items easily contribute to the clarity of messages as illustrated by Appendix C.
2. The tables feature is helpful in preparing orders, a direct request letter pattern. Sorting items arrayed as a table is as simple as selecting the table, clicking the words *table* and *sort*, selecting a column, and indicating *ascending* or *descending*.
3. The automatic insertion of dates and special characters such as trademark symbols and phonetic markings (Señora) are also easily illustrated.
4. The outline feature facilitates the transition to PowerPoint.

Integrate editing and e-mail

Since spell check features are not available in Eudora mail, I teach students to prepare and save their messages in the Windows environment. Edited Word or WordPerfect documents are then copied to the clipboard and the software is closed. Students then load Eudora, fill in the heading information, and "paste" the text of the e-mail into position. Instructions for integrating Windows software and Eudora are shown in Appendix D.

Introduce templates/wizards

Students often loose points on their early writing assignments because of errors in formatting of correspondence. A memo template or wizard gets students off to faster starts. Later in the semester, students use letter wizards. However, I no longer recommend resume wizards. These wizards are filled with desktop publishing gimmicry that is appropriate for the eyes of human resource personnel. The growing trend, however, is electronic submission or scanning of resumes and cover letters. Desktop publishing pizzazz as well as simple folds in the paper can be easily misintrepreted and translated into gibberish.

Share assessment plans

The revision step in the writing process requires emphasis. My students bring in a writing assignment saved on their disks. They retrieve the assignment, execute spell check and grammar check, and then show a draft to two classmates for comments. In addition, they retrieve my accompanying assessment checklist (see Appendix E), fill it in, and staple it to the front of their messages. Critical thinking skills of evaluating, decision making, problem solving, and teamwork are also strengthened.

Extend job searches

Allow students to read about companies and job opportunities over the internet. Netscape sites provide information about CEO's, corporate cultures, career fairs, and job openings. One typical site listed by the *PBL Business Leader* (Spring 1996) is http://www.cob.ohio-state.edu/dept/fin/osujobs.htm.

Introduce charts

The tables feature used in the direct request unit facilitates introduction to charts during the report writing unit. Students enter research results into a table. Making a chart is easily illustrated. Student select the appropriate cells, click the chart icon, and make adjustments in titles and legends.

Introduce PowerPoint

The use of PowerPoint integrates the students' knowledge of chart making and outlines. During the unit on oral communication, students can be shown how to change speech outlines to slides and how to bring in charts created during the report writing chapters.

Use search engines

Mary Ellen Guffey (1994) reports that no longer do college students need to rely "almost totally on the research resources ... physically available on their campuses to enhance their study. Today, the Internet extends any student's learning resources to educational, business, and governmental organizations around the globe." She suggests several sites including the use of these powerful Web search engines: InfoSeek--http://www.infoseek.com/ or Excite NetSearch--http://www.excite.com/.

Summary

While the content of a business communication course bulges with topics such as letter patterns and styles, short and long report, ethics, intercultural communications, oral presentations, and collaborative writing, technology can be incorporated as a tool that helps to get the work started, formatted, revised, and enhanced. Use the capabilities of the microcomputer to slowly build competencies and confidence.

Sources

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Appendix A

LECTURE NOTES

(a scanned page from *Instructor's Resource Manual To Accompany Business Communicaton Todzy*, 4th Ed., McGraw-Hill)

Editing Your Message

Three steps in the editing process:

1. Evaluate content and organization
2. Evaluate style and readability
3. Assess word choice

When editing for content and organization, check the
Order of points
Mix of general and specific
Balance arnong points
Emphasis
Quality and quantity of evidence
Irrelevant information
Quality of introduction and conclusion

When editing for style and readability, 6heck **the**
Tone
Interest level
Clarity and readability

Fog Index: readability forinula based on sentence length and word length

Other aspects of readability:
Sentence structure
Order and flow of ideas
Paragraph construction
Transitions

Appendix B

AD252 Quiz, Chapters 1-2--Spring 1996

1. Horizontal communication structures
   a) increase the number of levels in the organization
   b) reduce the number of levels in the organization
   c) reduce distortion
   d) both b and c

2. The formal communication chain can have the following disadvantage:
   a) increasing employee flexibility
   b) summarizing the lines of authority
   c) causing information overload
   d) fragmenting information

3. A sales manager giving instructions to a salesperson is an example of
   a) upward communication flow
   b) downward communication flow
   c) horizontal communication flow
   d) informal communication flow

4. Formal methods for channeling information upward include
   a) group meetings
   b) interviews with employees who are leaving the company
   c) formal procedures for resolving grievances
   all of the above

Appendix C

December 3, 19xx

Ms. Barbara Lane, Project Manager
Rackley Engineering Consultants
23, rue de Penthievre
75008 Paris
FRANCE

Dear Ms. Lane:

Would you please assist me as I begin plans to transfer to the Environmental Group in the Paris operation --my first overseas assignment? Because you have been working in this overseas location for several years, you may be able to give me some ideas on the following items:

- Can you suggest a strategy to help me optimize my purchase of francs, especially during the transition period?
- What degree of proficiency should I have in the French language? If I must speak French fluently, how can I manage until I learn the language?
- Can you suggest any books or other resources that will prepare my family and me for living abroad?

I will arrive on May 26 to begin work on June 2. Even though my transfer is six months away, my family and I wish to make our transition as smooth as possible. Consequently, receiving this information from you will help us achieve that goal.

Sincerely,

Don McClure
Staff Engineer

*From the Teacher's Resources Manual, *Basic Business Communication*, 5th ed.

Appendix D

INTEGRATING WINDOWS SOFTWARE AND EUDORA MAIL

1. Load Windows and Word or WordPerfect.
2. Prepare your text, edit, and proofread.
3. Complete spell check and grammar check.
4. Revise and save.
5. Choose **edit** in the menu bar and **select all**.
6. Send a copy of the text to the **clipboard**.
7. Close the document and the word processing program while staying in the Windows environment.
8. Load Eudora.
9. Start a new message.
10. Fill in the header and tab to the message area.
11. Choose **edit** in the menu bar and **paste**.
12. Queue the document.
13. Send the queued document.

Appendix E
Direct Request Exam

Directions: During this 50-minute period using Word 6.0 or WordPerfect 6.0, write a letter to your favorite high school teacher or current employer. Ask him/her to serve as a reference for an academic scholarship. (You supply a name for the scholarship.)

Print a copy of the checklist below now so that you can refer to it as a guide in developing the letter. (Or use *Window* on the Menu Bar to toggle between your letter and the checklist as you work.) Check each item as you develop the letter. Spell check and grammar check you letter before printing. Staple the completed checklist to the front of your letter. The checklist will be used in the evaluation process.

Description	Yes	No
My dateline is 2.0 inches from the top edge of the paper.		
I provided a complete inside address.		
I used an appropriate salutation.		
I used direct style by stating a direct request in the first sentence.		
I provided the name of the scholarship.		
I asked the reader to "target" the criteria specified by the scholarship: scholastic potential, leadership potential, potential for success in the major, and need (optional).		
If I referred to a resume, I placed an enclosure notation at the bottom of the letter.		
I provided the name and address of the scholarship committee.		
I mentioned a date that the reference letter should be mailed.		
I achieved the "you" attitude.		
My sentences express confidence.		
My sentences are carefully edited to achieve clarity without wordiness.		
I did not mention additional correspondence such as "if you have any further questions....)		
I have written an appropriate closing paragraph.		
I used a complimentary closing with appropriate punctuation.		
I used spell check and grammar check.		
I typed my name and signed my letter.		

**This exam, with its instructions and checklist, is placed on the fileserver. The teacher begins the exam session by writing the name of the file on the chalkboard. The students retrieve from Drive H and proceed using the software they prefer.*